

Policy Forum 06-09A: China's 'Abandonment' of NK a U.S. Neo-Con Fantasy

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"China's 'Abandonment' of NK a U.S. Neo-Con Fantasy"

Essay by Kim Tae Kyung

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I. Introduction

Kim Tae Kyung, reporter at OhMyNews.com, writes "the expectation that the Chinese leadership

would feel burdened by throwing money down the North Korean hole is fading when one considers that China has been the world's sixth largest economy since last year. Moreover, in order to avoid throwing money "into a bottomless pit," China is stressing -- almost forcing -- North Korea to reform and open up. Ultimately, the argument of U.S. neo-cons that China would abandon North Korea is becoming a dream or "fantasy" that can never come true."

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on contentious topics in order to identify common ground.

II. Essay by Kim Tae Kyung

- China's 'Abandonment' of NK a U.S. Neo-Con Fantasy
by Kim Tae Kyung

"China and North Korea depend on one another like lips and teeth. The two form an alliance of steel opposed to hegemony. General Secretary Kim Jong-il is our brother-in-arms, a comrade and a brother."

"China and North Korea are like brothers. We hope these feelings continue forever."

"No matter how the world changes, the Chinese and North Korean peoples are like the arms and legs of one body. The Chinese and North Korean peoples must stand in solidarity to prevent intrusions by outside forces, especially a Japanese invasion."

"A wealthy and stable North Korea gives China 100 kinds of benefits verses not a single detriment."

"Kim Jong-il has finally acknowledged that China was right in embracing reforms and opening its economy. This is truly a sincere transformation."

"North Korea is our traditional ally. We hope North Korea walks the path of reform and openness, and the people grow stronger and the nation more powerful. They need only absorb the experiences and lessons of our reform and openness. They should prevent corruption, minimize wealth inequalities, secure social order and not leave health and education up to the market."

"China experienced difficulties reforming and opening, but all North Korea should do is learn from China's experiences. In particular, since North Korea is like a sheet of blank paper, one can draw a very beautiful picture. For North Korea to become a powerful country would be very beneficial for China's interests and regional security in Northeast

Asia."

These are the comments made by Chinese netizens as of 10 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 19 on an article on North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's visit to China run on the Chinese portal site Sina.com.

The roughly 500 comments almost entirely praised Kim's visit to China. There were also words of praise for Kim personally, noting how "a small nation like North Korea was boldly confronting U.S. imperialism."

Hu's China to Abandon North Korea?

It's said the Chinese government regulates the Internet, but it doesn't appear that those comment were manufactured.

What grabs attention is that Chinese netizens are using the expression "depend on one another like lips and teeth" to express the Sino-North Korean relationship, and that there were many posts saying that China needed to actively support reform and openness in North Korea.

There is no guarantee that the thoughts of China's netizens accord 100 percent with those of the Chinese leadership. However, the situation over the last couple of years shows that there's a fair amount of proximity between the two.

After Chinese President Hu Jintao took control of the general secretary position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the leadership of the CCP Central Military Commission and the national presidency in September 2004, there has been many predictions that the Sino-North Korean relationship would grow estranged. It was predicted that the young-generation leader Hu, who differed from figures who were engaged directly in the Chinese Revolution like Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, would approach North Korea from a practical standpoint rather than out of erstwhile revolutionary solidarity.

Going a step further, this analysis has developed into the so-called "China will abandon North Korea argument." This view, pushed by U.S. neo-cons, posits that China, for which economic development is its most pressing concern, would seek to avoid friction with the United States and, if forced to choose between North Korea and the United States, would stand with the United States.

It's widely believed that early on, Bush administration really wanted six-party talks -- as opposed to bilateral North Korea-U.S. talks -- because if through that structure North Korea were to become isolated internationally, China would have no choice but to join in isolating North Korea.

This "abandon North Korea" view has grown stronger each time a situation unfavorable to North Korea develops, such as last February's nuclear declaration by Pyongyang and the recent issue over counterfeiting of U.S. dollars.

Sino-North Korean Ties Growing Stronger

Rewind your clock and look at the situation over the last couple of years; the reality is quite different. One gets the feeling that on the contrary, the political alliance between North Korea and China continues, and even grows firmer as it expands even into an economic alliance.

More precisely, North Korea is growing more dependent on China as time passes, and Chinese President Hu Jintao, rather than abandoning this poor neighbor, is embracing it even tighter.

This latest Sino-North Korea summit, held just three months after the last talk in October, took place when North Korean leader Kim Jong-il was called to China. Despite being an unofficial meeting, all nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party, China's most central body of leadership, were mobilized to meet Kim. On Jan. 19. China's welcoming of Kim was on par with the greeting a U.S. president would get, and that this was based on strategic considerations by the Chinese leadership, *The Hong Kong Economic Daily* analyzed.

Would it be too much to say that Kim Jong-il is becoming *darling* of Hu Jintao? According to the previously noted opinion of Chinese netizens, wouldn't it seem that the Sino-North Korean alliance is becoming an alliance of iron?

The expectation that the Chinese leadership would feel burdened by throwing money down the North Korean hole is fading when one considers that China has been the world's sixth largest economy since last year. Moreover, in order to avoid throwing money "into a bottomless pit," China is stressing -- almost forcing -- North Korea to reform and open up.

Ultimately, the argument of U.S. neo-cons that China would abandon North Korea is becoming a dream or "fantasy" that can never come true.

China's Historical Experience

Jean Jacques Grauhar, head of the European Union Chamber of Commerce who lived 10 years in Pyongyang and 12 in Seoul, said in an interview with the *Korea Economic Daily* that he thought U.S. policy toward North Korea was connected with Washington's Asia-Pacific policy to contain China through the nations that border it.

U.S. neo-cons and other conservative figures have two-sided views about China. On one hand, they expect that through coddling and agitating China, they can make it give up North Korea. On the other hand, wary of China's growth, they claim that China must be contained starting now through the U.S.-Japan alliance.

So on one hand, they expect to cooperate with China, while on the other, they point the tip of their sword toward it. Knowing this all too well, the Chinese leadership would find it difficult to give up North Korea, its "outer defense line."

Accordingly, some experts express views contrary to the "abandon North Korea" theory, saying that if China had to choose between permitting a U.S. attack on North Korea and allowing North Korea to possess nuclear weapons, it would recognize North Korea as a nuclear state. Through its historical experience, China knows well that when a neighboring ally has been attacked by outside forces, the Chinese mainland has also been attacked. Ming China's intervention in the Seven Years' War of 1592-1598, Qing China's waging of the first Sino-Japanese War and its participation in the Korean War all took place against this background.

Defector Hwang Jang Yop, a former secretary in North Korea's ruling Korean Workers Party, said during an address on Feb. 10 that the only way to resolve the North Korea problem was to sever the alliance between North Korea and China. He said Kim Jong-il believes in China, and this gives him confidence in his relations with surrounding states. Given current U.S. policies, however, there appears to be no way of severing ties between North Korea and China.

"Chinese Are Once Again Crossing the Yalu River"

The problem is that while the strengthening of the Sino-North Korean alliance might be effective in restraining hard-line U.S. policies toward North Korea, in the long-term, it's very worrisome to South

Korea as well.

In late July 2004, *Oriental Outlook*, a Chinese news weekly reported that Chinese were crossing the Yalu River. In the past, it said, they were mostly soldiers, but this time, the Chinese in question were merchants. During the Korean War in 1950, Chinese soldiers in military uniforms crossed the Yalu River, but this time around, businessmen were crossing the river in order to invest in North Korea. Accordingly, some were even using the term "an economic Northeast Project," referring to a development strategy criticized in South Korea as a Chinese attempt to assert control over the northern part of the Korean Peninsula.

In 2000, China's trade with North Korea amounted to U.S.\$488 million, which was similar to South Korea's trade with the North (U.S. \$425 million). In 2004, however, China's trade with the North grew to U.S.\$1.38 billion, while South Korea's amounted to no more than U.S.\$697 million.

China has become North Korea's largest trading partner. China is responsible for 38.9 percent of all North Korea's trade, while South Korea accounts for no more than 19.6 percent. Experts presume that when one includes Chinese aid to North Korea (for which figures aren't available), China accounts for 40~50 percent of North Korean trade.

Over 120 Chinese businesses are presumed to have invested in North Korea, yet only 15 South Korean companies have invested in Gaesong.

When Chinese President Hu visited North Korea in October, the two nations signed an agreement on economic and technical cooperation. Some foreign press reported the framework of this agreement was that in return for providing North Korea some U.S. \$2 billion in long-term aid, North Korea would guarantee the participation of Chinese corporations in resource development and construction of basic facilities.

A high-ranking South Korean official said that even though the rumor about U.S.\$2 billion in aid was unconfirmed, U.S.\$100 million in Chinese aid calculated over purchasing power parity, was some 4~5 times as powerful as U.S.\$100 million in South Korean aid because Chinese goods were cheaper. Even former President Kim Dae Jung, during a New Year's interview with MBC on Feb. 2, expressed great concern that North Korea was growing more dependent on China as time passed.

In South Korea, there is debate over whether we are "pumping" all sorts of aid into North Korea. But China, which is currently giving North Korea practically enough aid for Pyongyang to survive, does not show off its aid to the North; on the contrary, it has never revealed the amount of aid it gives. This is a difference between South Korea and China.

III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org. Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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